

Sias says KSU can realize her dreams

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Kentucky State University President Mary Evans Sias wakes up several times each night to jot down her dreams on a piece of paper beside her bed.

She dreams of how the university will look in 2015 – still a diverse institution accessible to anyone who wants an education. Its athletic programs make KSU the school to beat in any sport, and its choir, band, drama and student government programs are top notch.

Its new and renovated buildings are full because the university has a 75 percent freshman retention rate and a 60 percent graduation rate.

"These are not just dreams, they are a vision within reach," Sias said Tuesday in

her State of the University speech. "The journey will not be easy, but there is the possibility to get there in 10 years.

"I challenge all of you to open your minds," Sias said. "I challenge all of you to see the bright future I see nightly for this great institution. We have a rendezvous with our own destiny and we can ill afford to say we did not do all we could to make it a great institution."

KSU already has begun progressing toward Sias' dream. She said she is "enthusiastic about the winning record" the university's sports teams will have this year.

In six months, the university will have blueprints for Young Hall and the administration will decide whether to renovate
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the existing residence hall or build a new one.

Work should begin in January, Sias said. Soon, work will begin on renovating Hathaway Hall.

The university consolidated its five colleges into three, added two master's degree programs and is working on a master of special education program, Sias said.

About 13.5 percent more freshmen and 73 percent more graduate students joined the KSU community this year, Sias said.

New student enrollment is up 29 percent overall, a total of 812 students, said Roosevelt Shelton, assistant to the provost of academic affairs. Of the 812, 517 are freshmen, which is a 14 percent increase since 1999. The numbers could increase because late registration continues through today.

The office has not broken down yet where the students are from and what their ethnic makeup is, so Shelton does not know if the university was able to attract more Kentucky students.

Total enrollment is only up about 1 or 2 percent, because many of the students already at the university do not return the following year, Sias said.

"They cannot afford to pay the

tuition," Sias said. "We need more resources and we need to work on retention. We see a substantial dip after their junior year and then they trickle back in because they take a year off to work."

However, the university administration and alumni have worked hard this past year to increase student scholarship funds, raising about \$1.4 million together, Sias said.

"Having more student financial aid programs, academic services and social services is helpful to students," said Nabil Boudissa, a senior from France. "I am confident in our president and supportive of our president. I have seen the progress we have made and changes on campus. I know the vision she has will come true."

Staff is doing a great job of attracting students to the university, Sias said. She said if the university could retain all of its current students and continue to grow transfer and freshmen enrollment, the KSU population would quickly expand.

The university also created an Office of Grants and Established Projects and has begun reviewing all of its programs for effectiveness.

"We've done a lot with very little," Sias said.

As the smallest public university in Kentucky with only 2,300 students, KSU only received \$500,000 in new operating dollars last year and still was able to advance the university, create new programs and restructure the university, Sias said.

"We could have spent that on coal alone," Sias said. Or spent the money to fuel university vehicles.

She said she will be calling on faculty, staff and students in the next year to help her urge the General Assembly to pass the small school adjustment, which would provide KSU a additional \$1.5 million to \$2 million this year.

Student Government Association President Leonard Clemons said the university has great promise if everyone continues to work together. He said KSU is "on the rise."

"Spirit on campus is a lot more positive," Clemons said. "The union among faculty, staff and students is starting to come together. The whole feeling on KSU's campus is we are not looking back. We are going forward from here."